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Mountain Man / Nessmuk Bush Knife Review

Aki

- Gear reviews and tests - Edged tools - Fixed blades -

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Description :

Report and review on a trapper knife.

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I had read the "Nessmuk" legends and admired the knife Nessmuk had created as the do all blade for use in the wild as he experienced it, but due to the light construction it was not suited to handle some of the heavier camp duties I required. The old western trapper mountain man knives of the 1820 - 1840 period had some of the design features I admired, but the shape was not quite right.

Cariboo Blades - Scott Richardson & Aki Yamamoto From: wiseman

May 31, 2007

I spend as much time as life allows in the mountains. I have both climbed and hiked in most every western state and hunted & fished for many years in Hawaii, Colorado and North Idaho. Well, enough about me.

I have purchased 6 custom knives from various high end knife makers looking, no searching for the ultimate knife. You know, the one knife that fulfils a wide range of tasks that one seems to constantly face while wandering about in the mountains. The knife I had been looking for was not necessarily a typical hunting blade, but rather a knife that could be used to build a camp, split small wood for a camp fire, dig a fire pit, de-bark limbs to build camp furniture or chop splinters for fire starter.

One late night I was searching for mountain man style knife makers and somehow stumbled on the caribooblades.com site. I looked at the knives in the catalogue and as usual did not immediately spot the design combination I had been looking for so long to find. However, the site suggested they would make or design any knife if you wanted something special.

Needless to say I was excited but also somewhat sceptical as I had 2 other such offers and after paying many hundreds of dollars in the end was disappointed with the outcome. After gaining confidence in both Scott and Aki and their obvious technical skills and artistic approach to their work witnessed by both the organized and advanced internet site and the products they displayed, I decided to give them the go ahead with a rough outline of my ultimate "bush" knife. However, I had decided that due to the obvious advanced artistic leather work and carving skills possessed by Aki, I could really get something special. My additional requirements included carving both scales with a wolf head design and making a lanyard for the knife that would assure the knife could never be lost from the sheath. When asked to consider my requests they confidently said "no problem" and gave me a delivery date for the finished product.

During all of this I had asked Aki if she could carve a wolf head on a piece of cherry wood with a leather lanyard that could be worn around my neck. I have a wolf dog and admittedly have a wolf fetish. In addition, I ordered one of Aki's carved street faces for my wife. Having ordered the dream knife for myself, I thought it appropriate to order

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something for her too.

Soooo I patiently awaited the six week delivery date hoping for the best but retaining some scepticism that the final product would meet my expectation. The delivery arrived on time as promised and when I opened the package I was absolutely blown away. Not only had Scott achieved the design of the knife but had been able to deliver a perfectly balanced blade incorporating all of my previously unattainable and lofty design expectations.

Forged from 1/4 inch headsaw steel

Full flat grind

Elk antler

Once I had gotten over the achievement of Scott's metal work, I was able to admire the carefully designed scale carvings achieved by Aki. She had carved each scale with a different design and each was unique with unexpected detail. Scott had painstakingly located and roughed out a beautiful figured piece of crabapple for the scales that incredibly allowed Aki to enhance the wolf carvings. My adulation for the work of both Scott and Aki did not end there.

Howling at northern fly

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Wolf in Crabapple, detail

The sheath was itself a work of art. Aki had meticulously incorporated a flowing abstract design on the face of the sheath that carried a free spirited feeling much like the free spirit of the wolf faces she had carved so skilfully on the scales. The blade rested perfectly in the sheath and was secured by you guessed it a leather lanyard Aki had braided to secure the knife in the sheath. The leather work was flawless, the braiding even, tightly woven and certainly secured the knife against all possibility of loss in the bush. Now I had another problem because I had the absolute knife I had been waiting many years to possess, and now that I had my hands on it dare I use it.

A secure knife

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A leg tie

I did in fact use the knife and when I did I was not disappointed. The first thing I did with the knife was split some wood. The wood was about 6 inches in diameter and about a foot long. I struck the blade with another similar log to beat the blade through thus splitting the round log into usable firewood. The reason it worked so well and the reason I tried this test first was to see if Scott had managed to taper the blade from the thin cutting edge to the top of the blade in a manner that would permit the blade to wedge properly causing the log to split into usable firewood. Scott had in fact worked his magic and the blade wedged the round log nicely leaving me with wood for a fire.

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The next test was to see if I would be able to build a small camp table using the knife exclusively. First, I found some deadwood about 1 to 1.5 inches in diameter. I used the knife to make straight clean poles. Then I chopped the poles, again using only the knife, into pieces about 16 inches in length. Once I had a dozen or so pieces I used the blade to carve some notches in each of the pieces so I could tie them together with parachute cord which completed the tabletop.

The legs were similarly done and voila, I had a small usable camp table. I think I could use the back of the blade if I chose to drive 6 penny nails instead of notching each piece, but I did not want to chance scarring the blade just yet.

The third and final test was to splinter some matchstick size pieces for tinder. It took little effort with the hefty blade to de-bark some limbs and splinter wood for fire starter. I was very pleased to have such a well rounded tool to use on my treks into the mountains of North Idaho, the Bitterroot range in Montana or wherever my wanderings may carry me. I now have a camp knife capable of performing any chore demanded of it

One of my most important criteria in my satisfaction with any knife is the quality of the edge & the ability of the blade to hold an edge. After having used the knife to split wood, build the small camp table and chopping and splintering a considerable amount of fire starting material from larch, pine and cedar, I am impressed with the forged blade used in the "wiseman nessmuk" bush knife. After splitting nearly 40 pieces of kindling from the larch rounds the blade was still extremely sharp indicating its edge holding qualities. I am not surprised that the knife had such great edge quality as the balance and handling properties of the overall knife was the best I had ever purchased from a custom knife

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maker. Scott is a master at creating a forged blade, and not just a blade shape but also a blade that reliably holds a usable edge with even extreme use.

I am forever thankful to both Scott and Aki for their professional approach to a very difficult commission. The demands I made on them were far beyond any I had asked of others before and their combined skills yielded far more than I had any right to expect. Not only was each piece of the commission completed flawlessly but each was done with both practical and artistic precision.

I have not mentioned the wolf head carving or the street face. Both were included in the shipment and each was beautifully done. I have received many compliments on the wolf head and the street face has drawn some amazed looks when we tell people Aki had carved the street face from an avocado seed.

Both Scott and Aki are skilled crafts people, accomplished artists and professional in their approach to a commission. Even the packaging of the shipment was done with great care to assure that even the brutal handling of the uncaring couldn't damage the precious cargo.

This knife is on the caribooblades.com site and is identified as the "wiseman nessmuk" bush knife.

I have not included specific dimensions of any of the blades in this short report. I highly suggest you go to Caribooblades.com and check out the catalog of products that Scott and Aki have developed. The web site is beautifully done and easy to navigate.

This review was thoughtfully written by the customer with whom we designed the "wiseman nessmuk" bush knife. He put much time and consideration into its writing, and we would like to share it with those who may have similar interests.

Wolf pendant

Street character